

Mystery of Standish Legs

Duxbury Clipper

Wednesday, August 1, 2001

By AMY ROLLINS

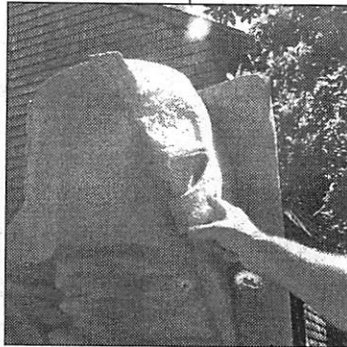
The backyard of a Halifax man may hold an important piece of Duxbury's history.

When the Myles Standish Monument was capped with an 18-foot granite statue of the Captain himself in the late nineteenth

century no one thought his lower half would become one of the more intriguing historical mysteries in town. In 1920, lightning struck the top of the monument, decapitating the statue.

The arms, head and shoulders went crashing to the ground; the legs remained intact on the top of the monument.

Now a set of 12-foot high, 10-ton legs are sitting on Marc Valentine's Dwight Street property in Halifax. These legs appear to be an exact likeness of the legs currently atop the monument. They are made of the same rare, black-flecked granite which created the monument



Halifax resident Marc Valentine points to the area of Standish's torso where lightning may have struck, breaking off his arm.

in 1898 and have cracks which coincide with reports from lightning damage.

Local historians agree that there is doubt as to the true history of the statue's legs. Patrick Browne, director of the Rural and Historical Society,

said it would be hard to determine whether these legs are the originals. Browne also said that if they were, they would definitely be of historical value, but it would be difficult to find an appropriate place to set them.

According to Don Ross, a Marshall Street resident who has been able to see the monument from his home for over fifty years, the damaged statue was reconstructed from the waist up, but when the new pieces went atop the legs, the cracked legs could not support the new weight.

Ross has collected articles from the Boston Globe and the Patriot Ledger archives in hopes of establishing a clear

Standish monument

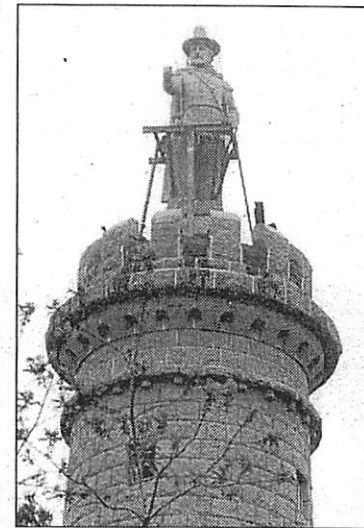
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history of the mystery of Myles Standish. He found a Boston Globe article dated the day of the lightning strike that notes, "the bolt apparently struck Capt. Standish on the head and passed down the right side, taking off the head at the shoulder and the arm just below...the bolt then passed into the monument and down the spiral stairway to the ground."

After the lightning strike in 1922, a Boston sculptor was charged with re-creating of the head of the statue. By 1926, a Globe article with the headline, "Myles Standish's New Head to Be Clamped on This Week" had run, predicting the complete repair of the monument. He also said there was an accompanying photograph of the sculptor with the head and a torso.

Ross said he could not find any news reports which confirmed the effective replacement of the head.

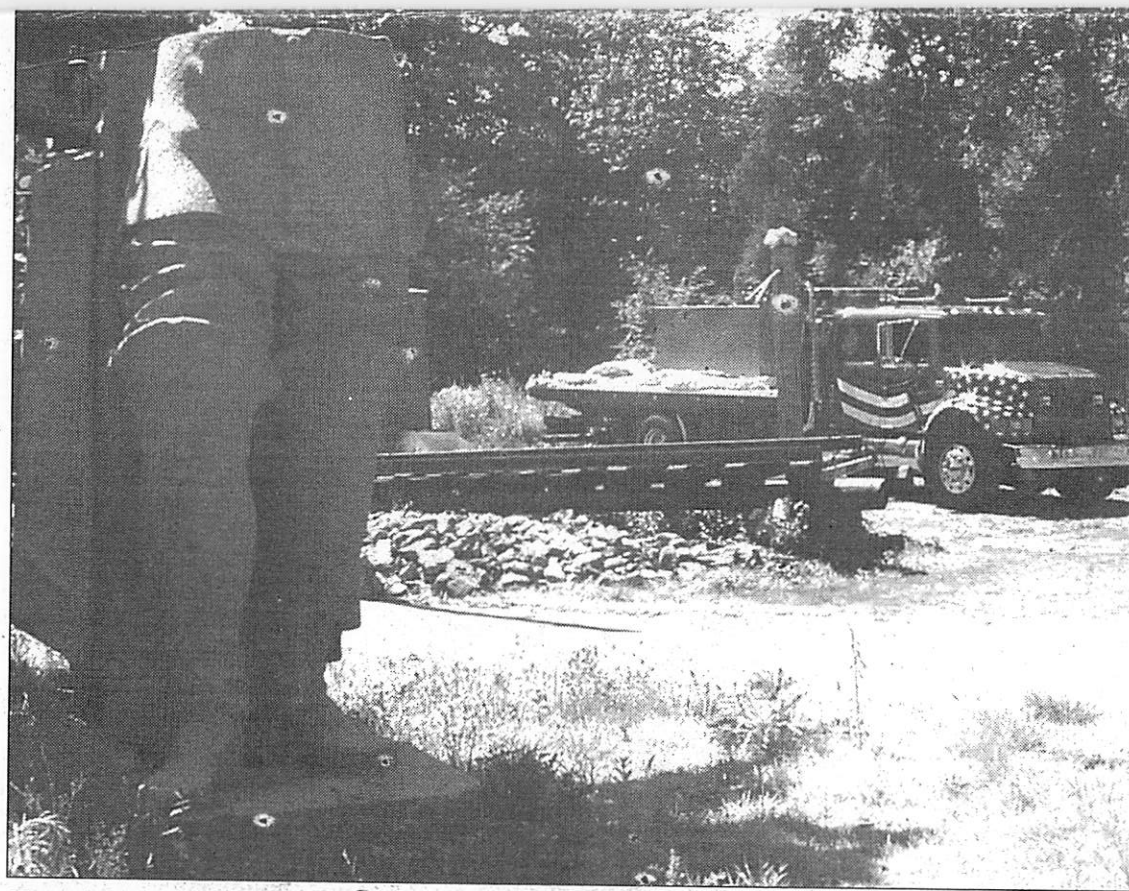
Instead, a 1954 article in the Globe by William deLue mentioned that the statue was not completed until 1930. "A new head was shaped and a new arm, but when workmen started to put Myles Standish together again, they found his legs too shaky to support his torso. Practically a whole new



In time for Duxbury's 350 anniversary, the monument and statue received extensive repairs in 1987.

figure had to be carved. By 1930, the Captain was back on his hill."

From 1930 to 1958, Ross said that the legs deemed too shaky to hold a new head



These 12-foot high, ten ton legs which are exactly the same as the legs that sit atop the Myles Standish monument now sit in Valentine's Halifax yard. Valentine is also caretaker for the National Flag Truck which sits to the right.

were held at Horrigan Granite in Quincy. When that company went out of business, Ross said, the legs moved to Monti's Memorials, another Quincy site.

The legs sat at Monti's in Quincy until 1998, when they transferred into the hands of Marc Valentine and his group of patriots interested in preserving national history. Valentine rescued the legs and the matching block of granite from being turned into headstones.

The legs have sat on Valentine's Halifax property for the past three years. They sit with a matching block of the rare granite, which Valentine says is almost as valuable as the legs. The block is enough to

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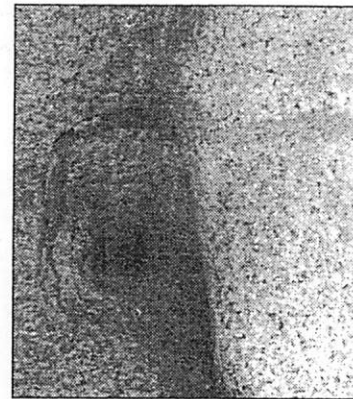
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make a head and a helmet, or a torso, but not both.

Valentine said he would like the legs to be in a central location in one of the towns Myles Standish lived in or near. "These legs sat in a Quincy granite yard for over 70 years and no one cared about them then," he said.

He said he has researched ways to display the statue, including the creation of a new torso or head to match the legs. "They can even use a thin, specialized fiberglass which can be covered with an inch or two of the granite and you wouldn't be able to tell the difference, even if you knocked on it," he said. "That way the upper portion would be light enough to be supported by the shaky legs."

An inspection of the legs in Halifax, revealed cracks down the backside between the cape and the legs, as well as a large crack around the



A dark gray oval next to the left foot outlines the location of what Valentine believes is a time capsule from the original 1898 statue.

circumference of the right leg, which Valentine said, would be the main support of the statue. Valentine pointed to a small area near the left foot which he believes is a time capsule placed there when the statue was erected in 1898. He said he will wait until the statue has a permanent home before uncovering the time capsule.

Selectman Margaret Kear-

ney agreed that the legs would be a seemingly valuable addition to Duxbury. She said she will investigate possible scenarios for the legs' future.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management is responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the park and monument. The official in charge of the park was out for rest of the month, but a spokesperson said the legs might be appropriate in a new visitors' center which is in the planning stages.

For now, Valentine's plan is to move the legs closer to the edge of Route 58 in Halifax. "Maybe by the main road, they will drum up more interest," he said. "What would be best would be to have the statue in a permanent place where people could see and appreciate it. Until then, its in good hands. We're taking good care of it."